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Sewing Silky Woven Fabrics

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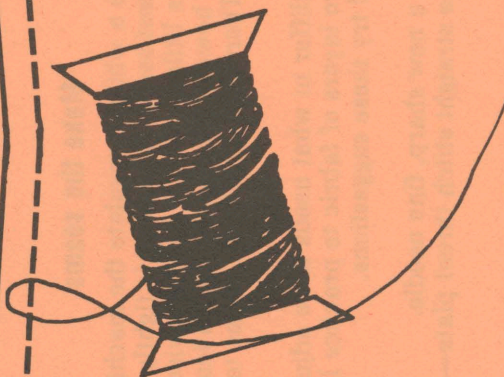
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sewing
silky woven
fabrics



Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
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sewing silky woven fabrics

Many soft, drapey, lightweight fabrics with a rich sheen are available today. While once made from silk, they are now usually easy-care polyester.

Choose the right pattern and notions

Patterns

Take advantage of softness and light weight. Look for styles with gathers, drape, flared shape, bias cut, or ruffles. These fabrics "ease" moderately well—well enough for a smooth set-in sleeve. Avoid styles with sculptured shapes that stand away from the body or those with a crisp, tailored appearance. Also, avoid large amounts of topstitching, especially vertical topstitching.

Interfacings

Interface the usual areas to give support or crispness—collars, cuffs, necklines, openings (buttons and buttonholes).

Select a light weight interfacing with the amount of crispness appropriate for the style. Keep in mind:

- Stiff interfacings tend to buckle when used in collars and cuffs.
- Non-woven interfacings, especially "all bias" types, are more likely to buckle than woven interfacings of similar stiffness.
- Fusible interfacings may not adhere well to silky fabrics. Fusibles tend to make the surface of the fabric look pebbly rather than smooth. The adhesive may ooze through silky fabrics.
- Interfacing the upper collar masks the seam allowances.

Thread

Choose the finest, softest thread available. Polyester or cotton-covered polyester thread labeled "extra-fine" or "for lightweight fabrics and machine embroidery" are best. Second choice are those threads labeled "long fiber polyester" or "spun from long staple polyester." These are softer than general purpose threads.

General purpose polyester or cotton-covered polyester threads can be used, but seams may be a little stiffer and may have a greater tendency to pucker.

Needles

Select a sharp needle, not the ballpoint type. "Universal ballpoint" needles meant for both knits and wovens may give you trouble. The finer the needle, the better. Size 11 or 75 is good; 9 or 10 (65 or 70) is even better. Change the needle as soon as you notice that it is dull or damaged.

Damaged needles can snag delicate fabric. Do not sew over pins.

Pins

Use fine, sharp pins such as silk pins. Pins labeled "pleating" are a little thinner and a little shorter than other pins. Do not use bent or rough pins; they will snag the fabric.

Zippers

Look for flexible zippers with narrow coils and lightweight tapes.

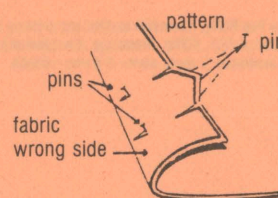
Prepare to sew

Wash and dry the fabric, interfacings, and zipper as you would the finished garment. This removes excess finish from the fabric, making it easier to sew.

These fabrics pick up oil and grease easily. Make sure washer and dryer surfaces are clean. To cut down static, use a liquid fabric softener in the rinse water. Fabric softener sheets used in dryers can cause greasy-looking marks.

A marked cutting board helps to line up fabric for cutting. To avoid damaging the fabric, pin within the seam allowances when possible. Use sharp shears with smooth blades and smooth cutting action.

Tracing carbon can leave little grease marks when the fabric is pressed. Instead, mark with pins and little clips in seam allowances. If you prefer tailor tacks, use fine thread and a minimum of stitches.



Make the seams

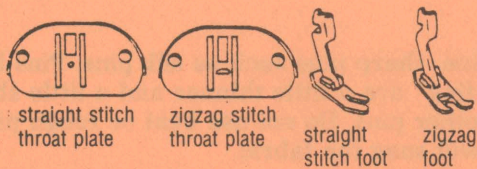
It may take a while to regulate the machine to make the best seam. The fabric is tightly woven, it does have a little stretch in the crosswise directions; however, it does not in the lengthwise direction. Therefore, lengthwise seams tend to pucker.

Machines differ in what needs to be adjusted. Sew through two layers of fabric to practice lengthwise seams, and try these suggestions.

- Put in a new sharp, fine needle.
- Use the straight stitch throat plate—the one

with the small hole, rather than the zigzag throat plate. The small hole keeps the fabric from going down into the machine.

- Use a straight stitch foot, rather than the zigzag foot, for more control over the fabric.



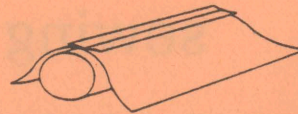
- Loosen both upper and bobbin tension, but maintain good stitch formation.
- Use 9-10 stitches per inch.
- Hold the fabric taut as you sew.
- Don't pull the fabric, but hold it under a little tension both behind and in front of the needle.

You may not be able to eliminate puckering completely on lengthwise seams; crosswise and bias seams—even slightly bias ones—don't generally pucker.

Press carefully

Use a steam iron on low temperature. A press cloth can help protect against too hot an iron. To avoid pressing an imprint of the seam edge on the outside fabric, use one of these methods:

- Use a seam roll.
- Press on a sturdy cardboard tube.
- Press on rolled magazines covered with fabric.



- Place wide strips of heavy paper or light cardboard under the seam allowances.

Finish professionally

Select a seam finish that controls fraying without adding bulk. A row of straight stitching near the edge of each seam allowance is usually sufficient.

Here's another easy seam finish: after pressing the seam allowances open, press them together to one side. Straight stitch about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the seam. Trim the seam allowances close to the stitching.

Zigzag stitching will tend to show up as a ridge on the outside. Also, zigzag stitching sewn through one layer of lightweight fabric tends to pull up the fabric.

Hand blind hem

If fabric frays a lot, turn under the edge and stitch it. Otherwise, stitch $\frac{1}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the edge. Use loose blind stitches between the two fabric layers.

Narrow machine hem

This is effective on very flared, full skirts and ruffles. Turn up the hem about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch longer than you want it to be. Press. Stitch close to the fold. Trim hem allowance close to stitching. Turn up the hem close to the cut edge and press. Stitch close to the fold. This makes a narrow $\frac{1}{8}$ inch machine hem.

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